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Should the CIA's black arts go back into darkness?

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American intelligence correctly predicted that Vietnam would invade Cambodia, that China would invade Vietnam and that the Soviet Union would not invade China. But, reassuring as those recent successes were, the Central Intelligence Agency's record elsewhere has been less good. Iran is the worst example. In 1953 the CIA helped restore the Shah to his throne, but in 1978 it had scarcely a clue that he was about to be toppled. Before that, the Shah knew that a communist coup was brewing in Afghanistan, but the CIA did not.

In Nicaragua, Zaire and Yemen, according to American officials, intelligence on insurrections and invasions has been late and inadequate, with the result that subsequent American policies have sometimes seemed dangerously make-shift. Inter-agency reviews after the Shah's fall have concluded that American intelligence does not know much, either, about what is happening in such places as Indonesia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia or even next door, in Mexico.

What ails the CIA? One problem is the tendency for policymakers to ignore intelligence that does not support their preconceptions. Israeli intelligence warned the Carter administration about the Shah's peril months before his fall. So did low-level members of the American embassy in Teheran, but the White House did not want to hear bad news about its ally. A further difficulty is that the administration, in order to avoid offending allies, has forbidden its agents in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, as it did in Iran, to make contact with potential subversives.

A more intractable problem is that although American intelligence is capable of gathering vast quantities of information, especially by technical means, it lacks the skilled manpower to make sense of what it collects. And then there is deep unhappiness in the intelligence community with Admiral Stans-

field Turner, President Carter's Naval Academy classmate and director of the CIA. Appreciated at first as a man who shared the president's forthright and businesslike attitude, he is now accused of arbitrarily switching people around and of trimming agency reports to suit White House political views. Morale at the CIA has fallen so far that more than 1,000 of its men have left in the past two years.

But undoubtedly the diagnosis most often made is that the CIA is suffering from a surfeit of democracy. In government circles it is now frequently argued that there has been too much congressional oversight, newspaper exposure, legal restriction and public access, and that the black arts should be restored to dimmer light, or to darkness, where they can thrive.

"The most serious problem we face," according to the CIA's deputy director, Mr. Frank Carlucci, is an inability to protect intelligence sources from exposure. According to CIA officials, this means that foreign intelligence services are reluctant to share information, potential agents refuse to work for the CIA and American businessmen decline to report back after their travels because they fear that their actions might later become known through a congressional leak or a lawsuit under the Freedom of Information Act.

Another special target of criticism is the 1974 Hughes-Ryan amendment, which holds that before the CIA can undertake covert political action in another country, it must notify eight separate congressional committees consisting of 163 legislators and 41 staff members. The requirement, according to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, virtually eliminates the possibility of secret American intervention in other countries and limits the CIA to "doing research that might as well be done in the Library of Congress".



Turner's on the hit-list.

American officials confirm that the CIA now engages in only a few minor covert operations. Legal restrictions are not the only reason, however. President Carter has openly declared his distaste for interference in the affairs of other countries.

The president's attitudes and congressional restrictions on intelligence are born of America's bad experiences in Vietnam and the disclosures of excesses by the CIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation—assassination attempts against Mr Fidel Castro, efforts to "destabilise" the Allende regime in Chile, infiltration of American protest groups and illegal surveillance both of radical political parties and of private citizens. But now Republicans, conservative

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